41: Bates & Abbott N-5 (1953) 1958
OR21 Woleai OR21
Ifaluk

251 Breadfruit is the only food on Ifaluk that can be stored for any length of time (they sometimes smoke fish, but not to keep it for more than a few months). To preserve the breadfruit, the skin is scraped off and the pulp cut into sections which are put into big, open-meshed rope baskets. These are carried to the lagoon, weighed down with coral blocks, and left to soak overnight. The baskets are then removed from the lagoon, covered with leaves, and left for still another night. The pulp can then be kneaded into a paste, which is wrapped in leaves and buried in the ground. The preserving process is quite comparable with that used for sauerkraut, and the stuff lasts for years. We didn't like the taste of this mar, but apparently it is nutritious enough. Considerable quantities are buried every year, insuring a food [931] supply in case of a disaster like a typhoon.

262 There are seven or eight named varieties of breadfruit, distinguished 139 by the size and appearance of the fruit, shape of the leaves, and the like. In the case of two of the varieties, the fruits have seeds, and in these the roasted seeds are used for food. They have a chestnut-like flavor and quality.

Almost as important as breadfruit were the two taros. This is perhaps doing violence to the word "taro" since it is using it to cover two similar but quite distinct kinds of aroids with edible tubers, one called by the botanists *Colocasia* and the other *Cyrtosperma*. The taro of Polynesia is *Colocasia*, but on Ifaluk both plants were about equally important. These again are anciently cultivated plants, vegetatively propagated, each with endless named varieties. The *Colocasia* on Ifaluk was called wot and the *Cyrtosperma*, pulach (the "ch" is also rendered as an "x" sort of a sound—we argued endlessly about how to spell Ifalukian words).

Both wot and pulach are aroids, that is, they belong to the botanical family that includes the "elephant-ear" plants, the Calla lilies and the Jack-in-the-Pulpit of North America. A third edible aroid, *Alocasia*, called file by the Ifalukians, was grown on the atoll, but it was considered definitely inferior to the other two and little used as food.

● 244 Wot and pulach were grown in low, swampy ground in the interior of the islets. The central part of Falalap was almost all swamp, and the main gardens were located there. These taro swamps occur all through the Pacific and it is difficult to know now to what extent they

41: Bates & Abbott N-5 (1953) 1958
OR21 Woleai OR21
Ifaluk

are "natural" and to what extent man-made, because they have been subject to careful cultivation for many generations. The care of the gardens is exclusively women's work and they become expert gardeners. The plants are set in neat rows in rectangular patches, each patch belonging to a particular household so that each household on the atoll has its share of the large Falalap gardens. Weeds grow luxuriously in the rich, mucky soil, and weeding is the main gardening chore. The weeds, I was interested to see, are always buried in the muck, so the practice of "green manuring" is an ancient one here. With young plants, coconut leaves were sometimes used as mulch, to cut down the growth of weeds.

I was greatly impressed, watching these women go about their work, at how little a Westerner would be able to tell them about gardening practices, at how well their methods were adapted to the plants and environment of their atoll. Perhaps one could put this another way, and wonder at how little modern "civilized" man with all his science has been able to improve on, or change, the gardening practices developed by peasant cultures through generations living close to the earth. We have made drastic changes in large-scale agriculture, but the gardener, throughout the world, shares a curiously large fund of common lore.

But I had intended to write here about food, not about agricultural methods. Wot and pulach were eaten to some extent, even during the breadfruit season, just as the preserved breadfruit (mar) was eaten to some extent at other times of the year, making some variation in the daily monotony of starch. There were many slightly different ways of cooking these tubers. We liked best a way of preparing wot (*Colocasia*) whereby it was mashed, cooked with coconut cream, moulded into little balls in a pot, and the whole covered with a thick paste of coconut meat. The effect was a little like that of mashed sweet potatoes served with heavy whipped cream.

Coconut, of course, permeated every aspect of Ifalukian cooking—the milk from green nuts and ripe nuts, the flesh from green nuts and ripe nuts, the sap from the cut flower stalks (here called hachi, perhaps best called "toddy" in English). The coconut was more often used as a supplement in cooking breadfruit or taro, as a seasoning, or the